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Contact: Gregg Fishman, Communications Coordinator
916-327-7500, ext. 516
916-342-9508 mobile

CALIFORNIA COUNTIES HAIL BUDGET AGREEMENT

SACRAMENTO - Both houses of the California Legislature passed a balanced budget this evening that will support California counties’ efforts to reduce crime and recidivism, begin rebuilding aging local roads and bridges, reduce greenhouse gas emissions statewide, provide more and better treatment for the mentally ill and those struggling with substance use disorders, and offer more services to at-risk children.

“This budget reflects the great working relationship California’s counties have with the Governor, his Administration, and legislative leadership,” said Matt Cate, Executive Director of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC). “We’ve been able to build a real partnership in terms of delivering the programs and services our constituents expect from us. Counties are helping the state safely reduce prison overcrowding, implement health care reform, address the nexus between mental illness and criminal behavior, meet our climate goals, and begin to fix crumbling infrastructure. This budget reflects the value of local county services to the people of California and the priorities we share with California’s elected leaders.”

Notably, the budget agreement calls for the state to begin paying local governments for mandated services the state has owed for more than a decade. The state’s total mandate debt is about $900 million. The 2014-15 budget calls for a $100 million payment to counties, cities, and special districts now, with the possibility of paying off the rest of the debt if state revenues continue to outpace estimates over the next year. This commitment returns discretionary revenue to counties and it also helps the state reduce the so-called “wall of debt” that has been a priority for Governor Brown.

Similarly, providing $242 million for counties and cities by repaying early the Highway User Tax Account (HUTA) loan helps pay down the “wall of debt” while creating jobs and stimulating the economy through investment in local transportation infrastructure.

The budget also includes another $500 million for jail construction—a huge help to counties that have assumed significant new responsibilities for criminal offenders in the past few years. The money will be made available through a competitive grant process.
managed by the Board of State and Community Corrections, which will emphasize treatment and programming space that can help counties manage longer-term inmates and help them more successfully reintegrate into the community.

“Some counties were well-positioned to take on the new responsibilities and manage the impact of public safety realignment,” said Cate. “But others have been dealing with aging and crowded jail facilities. The additional $500 million in facility investment will help build the right kind of beds that facilitate reentry and recidivism reduction efforts – giving us the best chance of turning lives around and improving public safety.”

Counties applaud the Governor and the Legislature for adopting an on-time budget that balances smart and strategic investments with an important commitment to long-term fiscal stability.

*The California State Association of Counties is the voice of California’s 58 counties at the state and federal level.*

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